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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002047

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TAGS: PGOV PTER I2

SUBJECT: APPARENT KIDNAPPING OF DIYALA HEALTH DG FROM  
INSIDE MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Classified By: Political Counselor Margaret Scobey for  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (U) This is a PRT Diyala cable.

¶2. (C) SUMMARY: The apparent kidnapping of Diyala's top health official and three companions from inside the Ministry of Health June 12 has raised considerable consternation among Diyala Sunnis. Local officials in the Iraqi Islamic Party, of which the kidnap victims were members, claim that pressure from Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi has spurred an investigation by the Ministry of Interior. The kidnap victims have not, however, been found. Diyala Sunnis' already existing fears that no place in Baghdad is safe for them seem to have been realized. END SUMMARY.

¶3. (C) PolOff received successive calls on the evening of June 12 from the Auwf Rahoumi al-Rubei'i, Deputy Governor of Diyala and an IIP member; Hamdi Hassoun al-Zubaidi, Chairman of the IIP in Diyala; and Hafiz Abdulaziz al-Juburi, Assistant Governor for Administrative Affairs and an IIP member. All three sources claimed that Dr. Ali al-Mahdawi, the Director-General of Health in Diyala, had been kidnapped that morning from within the Ministry of Health. PolOff continued to follow up with all three sources.

¶4. (C) According to all three sources, Mahdawi received a telephone call on June 11 from the office of the Minister of Health, informing him that the Minister wished to meet with him at 0930 on June 12. Mahdawi arrived at the Ministry of Health in Baghdad between 0900-0930, in a three vehicle convoy; only one vehicle was allowed to enter the Ministry compound. Passengers in the Land Cruiser allowed to enter included Mahdawi, his brother, his driver, and a bodyguard.

¶5. (C) By around 1100, there was no sign of Dr. Ali, and occupants of the cars that had not been allowed inside - who formed the rest of Mahdawi's protective detail - became uneasy. Members of the detail attempted to contact Dr. Ali and his companions by telephone, but were unable to make contact. Finally, at approximately 1200, one of the bodyguards received a call from Mahdawi, who told him "in a shaky voice" that the two cars should return to Ba'qubah. Mahdawi told them his car would return later, "by the old route" - a reference to the road that connects Baghdad to Ba'quba by way of Mada'in and Nahrawan (an area of substantial JaM activity) and South Buhriz, (an area of substantial insurgent/AQIZ activity). Because of the insecure nature of this road, it would be very unusual choice for a high-profile official; the bodyguards believed that this was an attempt by Mahdawi to alert them to the fact that he had been kidnapped.

16. (C) Rather than returning to Ba'qubah, Mahdawi's guards contacted Mahdawi's son, who in turn contacted the provincial IIP leadership. Diyala's IIP leaders quickly alerted the national leadership. By the afternoon of June 12, they say, VP Hashemi was arranging for a force from the Ministries of Interior and Defense to enter the Ministry of Health and conduct an investigation into the apparent kidnap. According to Zubaidi, the investigation, conducted on the evening of June 12, did not recover any of the disappeared persons. It did, however, establish (based on the visitors logs at both the entrance of the Ministry and at the Minister's office) that Mahdawi had not only entered the Ministry, but had seen the Minister.

17. (C) Mahdawi would be the second top Diyala MOH official to be kidnapped in Baghdad in six weeks. On April 22, Dr. Faris Taha al-'Azzawi, Diyala's MOH Director of Planning and the primary POC with CF, was kidnapped. He had traveled to Baghdad to secure the release of his brother, who had been arrested after killing two of a group of JaM members who had allegedly been attacking his family home in Baghdad. 'Azzawi's body was found with marks of torture several days later.

18. (C) COMMENT: If indeed the Diyala Director-General of Health and companions have been kidnapped from within the Sadr-controlled Ministry of Health, it will likely provoke reprisals in Diyala. Mahdawi is very well-connected within the IIP (as evidenced by the quick reaction to his capture) and the Sunni community at large, and his abduction is assumed to have been a brazen intimidation attempt by the Jaysh al-Mahdi. According to

BAGHDAD 00002047 002 OF 002

Diyala's Deputy Governor, in a conversation with a PRT interpreter June 7, the IIP had nominated Mahdawi as a candidate for the position of Deputy Minister of Health; Sunnis here are assuming that the abduction was the Minister's way of saying "no." End comment.

SPECKHARD